1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

346 778 surmounted with drapery of many colours, stands in the middle of the floor of the storey above. The four prayer-wheels practically touch each other; there is about a yard of free ground between the wheels and the side walls, and a larger space between the doorway and the first wheel. The *lha-gong* is primarily the place of worship of the nuns—*in-é-bu*—and they are meant to be responsible for the services and good order of this place. The big wheels are turned by people sitting down, and there are wooden handles attached to the base which make this operation easier. Each time one of the big wheels completes a revolution a small bell is rung. The wheels are covered with paper of a vaguely Chinese design, representing fantastic flowers and goddesses.

The first storey is approached by an external wooden staircase on the east side. It leads first of all into a corridor with an unused cooking place; at the back of that is a small and completely dark chamber called *tyang-gong* which is employed for mystic fasting and contemplation and also for the weekly ceremony of *kong-so klon* which is performed, at considerable risks, it is believed, to the officiant, to cleanse the monastery and neighbourhood of those devils which are infesting it. [783 785]

The main first-storey room is very similar to the one below, except that the books and images on the altar are different. This first-floor altar is flanked by a pair of thunder-birds—*sa-dher*—resembling Chinese dragons in silhouette cut out of cardboard. A couple of books are also kept permanently on the altar. To the right of the altar is a cupboard containing the sacred book Rin-chet; this book is treated with great reverence and the cupboard which holds it receives bowls of water and *chimi* as though it were an altar. But none of the lamas of Lingthem can read this book, nor do they know the proper ceremonials which should accompany the reading. On the four supporting columns hang wooden masks such as are worn when 'devil dances' are performed; but these actual masks, though representing named supernaturals, are not made for wearing, nor are dances performed in the monastery. Suspended from the cross-beams—for there is no ceiling and the reed thatch can be seen between the beams—are a number of sacred scroll pictures (*tang-ku*) but they have suffered so much from the weather that they are practically indecipherable. [778]

[346] To the west of the main room, above the *lha-gong* is a lumber room containing paper-presses and other paraphernalia not in constant use. The Lepchas make paper out of the pounded underbark ● 289

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

of two species of daphne (*ri-kan-too* and *dé-nok*) cooked to a pulp and then spread over coarse canvas on stretchers under flowing water. Paper can be made by anyone, either for monastery use or for sale; but since there are no printing blocks in Zongu books have to be sent away to be stamped. For ordinary writing an ink is made out of black earth.

To the front of the monastery is a piece of artificially raised level ground of perhaps fifteen yards depth. It is covered with fairly rough short grass; and at the far edge against the low stone wall are set up a number of prayer flags in memory of the dead, and a few for the benefit of the living. There are one or two small outcrops of rock. All round the building, except in front of the porch, is a narrow flower border in which are grown European flowers, of which seeds or cuttings have been brought from Gangtok—hollyhocks, petunias, sweet william, geraniums, dahlias, and flowering cactuses. In the grass near the wall are several large bushes of small-flowered pink and red roses and some large clumps of hydrangeas. The flowers from these plants are used to decorate the lamaist altar, in preference to the numerous orchids which can be found in the neighbourhood.

Below the monastery wall is a small wood chiefly composed of juniper and *ficus*; about fifty yards from the monastery inside the wood are four *choten* walls—long rectangular stone barrows with stones inscribed with prayers let into the side. The most considerable of these is surmounted by a terra-cotta decoration of a half-moon and three diminishing circles. These *choten* are not funeral piles, nor even cenotaphs; their intention is apotropaic.[6] Some religious ceremonies are performed by the *choten*, particularly those in which both lamas and Mun (the priests of the old Lepcha religion) take part, for the latter are not allowed to officiate within the monastery precincts. The wood is also used as a public latrine during festivals, and animals, particularly pigs and cows, come to pasture there.

To the right of the monastery is an ordinary Lepcha house (except that the entrance is on the west instead of the east side) which is normally the home of the monastery custodian who looks after the garden and ground. He has a small garden (*sing*) in front of the house and also one or two little enclosures with

[6] I am employing the term *apotropaic* for all religious actions whose aim is preventative rather than curative. The *choten* are to keep devils away, not to expel those already present.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

from below the top would also revolve; and if one happened to be having a bath at the same time the effect was rather startling until we grew accustomed to expect it. A flange projected from the rim of the drum, and this struck a bell at every turn, thus enabling the worshipper to keep a count, for it would be unwise to finish with an inauspicious number. It had a tinkling sound like the bell in a village shop; and I had only to hear it to be immediately transported to the English countryside.

The upper storey was reached by an outside staircase and contained three rooms. The largest was more or less identical with the main hall below, and also contained an altar, complete with images and books. There were also several fearsome-looking masks, said to represent Lord Konchen, which were used for dances. This room was used as a general store-room: in one corner were a number of printing blocks and apparatus for making paper, also odds and ends of ceremonial equipment, coloured umbrellas, peacocks' feathers, and such-like. Some of the pillars were roughly carved, and decorated with crudely coloured dragon designs. The ceiling was unplastered, and on the beams above a number of immense copper vessels and cooking pots were stored. This was our bedroom, and it always reminded me of the backstage of a theatre set for a Christmas pantomime. It would never have surprised me to see a *Corps de Ballet* come tripping into the room; and when the light was put out the last thing one saw, before dropping off to sleep, was the gilded face of the large central Buddha faintly gleaming in the light of the flickering wick. In the morning we would usually awake to the pattering sound of a bare-footed novice, whose duty it was to refill the seven altar-bowls with water.

There was another small room, little bigger than a cell, which was used by certain monks for the purpose of private meditation. It was only about nine feet square, and its solitary window was heavily swathed in sacking, so as to exclude every particle of light. From time to time one

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

windy days my favourite tree would bend and sway with incredible grace: it reminded me of some frail craft riding a stormy sea.

When we first arrived the hillsides were covered with yellow daphne, the bark of which is used to make paper. There were also a number of flowering apricots, orange trees, and ferns of every description, including the huge umbrella-like tree-fern, the pith of which can be made into spirit. Rather strangely, for Sikkim is famous for its flora, we found no flowers, but the undergrowth was thick with wormwood, which saturated the air with its pleasantly bitter scent.

According to the Lepcha dictionary the word Lingtem means "a mixture of slope and level: to be out of the perpendicular, to incline, to have leaning outwards." The place is all of these, except that the amount of level ground is negligible; and it was not possible to go more than a hundred yards or so in any direction without going either steeply up or down hill. The lowest and highest houses in the village were not more than a mile apart; but to go from one to the other involved a climb of well over fifteen hundred feet.

There were altogether thirty-three houses in Lingtem, and a total population of one hundred and seventy-nine souls. These thirty-three houses were spread about over several square miles of country, and in no particular spot were more than three or four grouped together. The grouping was entirely haphazard and in no way based upon relationships: a man might be at one end of the village, his brother a mile away. There was no attempt at planning; the village had just grown up like this. Additional houses would be built on any suitable site: the proximity of relations was of less importance than the selection of a spot that was free from evil influences. The monastery was situated in roughly the centre. In addition to its ordinary function as a place of worship, it served also as a village club. Twice every month there would be religious festivals, when anything up to